

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MOSCOW CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

REFS: A. MOSCOW 6663, B. MOSCOW 4039

SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO AN AMERICAN PARTICIPANT AT THE RECENTLY HELD MOSCOW CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS, THE CONFERENCE PROVIDED A USEFUL AND RELATIVELY NON-CONTENTIOUS AND UNMANIPULATED FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF WORLD PROBLEMS BY REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY FAITHS. AN IZVESTIYA ARTICLE, HOWEVER, SAYS THAT THE CONFERENCE TOOK "PROGRESSIVE" AND "ANTI-IMPERIALIST" POSITIONS ON A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

1. BRUCE RIGDON, A PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY FROM MCCORMACK SEMINARY IN CHICAGO WHO ATTENDED THE RECENTLY-CONCLUDED MOSCOW CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR A FIRM
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PEACE, DISARMAMENT, AND JUST RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLES," (JUNE 6-10) AS A AN OBSERVER REPRESENTING WILLIAM THOMPSON, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, BRIEFED US ON IT. RIGDON IS A VETERAN OF DEALING WITH SOVIET CHURCHMEN AT ECUMENICAL MEETINGS OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN GENEVA AND HAS VISITED THE USSR A NUMBER OF TIMES SINCE THE EARLY

SIXTIES.

2. ACCORDING TO RIGDON, THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES WERE ON THEIR GOOD BEHAVIOR, WITH THE RESULT THAT THE CONFERENCE PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING, NON-POLEMICAL, AND NON-CONTENTIOUS ONES HE HAD ATTENDED IN A LONG TIME. SESSIONS WERE LOOSELY STRUCTURED AND RELAXED, WITH NO VOTING, NO MANIPULATION IN THE CHOICE OF SPEAKERS, AND NO PRESSURE TO ARRANGE A MAJORITY VIEW OR A CONSENSUS ON ANY TOPIC OR FINAL STATEMENT. IN ADDITION TO THE PLENARY SESSIONS, THERE WERE FOUR DISCUSSION SECTIONS WITH A GOOD DEAL OF GIVE AND TAKE AND WHERE EVERYBODY HAD A CHANCE TO SPEAK. EACH RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION ALSO MET SEPARATELY AND SUBMITTED A REPORT. REGDON COMMENTED THAT THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS PRACTICALLY DID NOT EXIST, BECAUSE NO VOTE WAS TAKEN AT ANY TIME, EVEN ON THE TEXT OF THE FINAL RESOLUTION.

3. ON THE DEBIT SIDE, NO DETAILED OFFICIAL RECORD WAS KEPT OF CONFERENCE DISCUSSIONS, WITH THE RESULT THAT WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD AT THE END WAS THEIR PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS AND SUCH PERSONAL NOTES AS THEY MAY HAVE KEPT. THE CHAIRMAN OF EACH SECTION SUBMITTED A BRIEF REPORT OF ITS DISCUSSIONS WHICH SERVED AS THE BASIS FOR A FINAL STATEMENT BUT DID NOT FORM PART OF THE OFFICIAL RECORD. THE FINAL STATEMENT AND OTHER PLENARY DOCUMENTS WERE DRAFTED BY PAULUS MAR GREGORIUS, THE BISHOP OF NEW DELHI OF THE SYRIAN

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ORTHODOX CHURCH OF MALABAR, WHOM RIGDON DESCRIBED AS U.S.-EDUCATED AND BRILLIANT
S WAS SO SKILLFULLY DRAFTED THAT IT MANAGED TO OFFEND NO ONE. AND GIVEN THE PRESENCE OF ARAB AND JEWISH DELEGATES, EVEN ITS TREATMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI IMPASSE DID NOT AROUSE AND JEWISH PROTEST; IT MERELY POINTED TO THE NEED FOR ARAB SELF-DETERMINATION AND COMPLETELY FINESSED THE QUESTION OF A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND.

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4. THE CONFERENCE WAS ATTENDED BY 663 DELEGATES FROM 107 COUNTRIES AND REPRESENTING ALL THE MAJOR FAITHS OF THE WORLD. RIGDON FOUND THIS ASPECT OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE OPPORTUNITY IT PROVIDED FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL DISCUSSION ITS GREATEST ATTRACTION. U.S. JEWISH GROUPS WERE NOT REPRESENTED, ALTHOUGH THE CHIEF RABBI OF BRITAIN AND THE CHIEF RABBI OF CANADA WERE PRESENT. DESPITE EARLY SOVIET INTEREST IN INVITING A LARGE U.S. GROUP, ONLY SIX INVITATIONS TO AMERICANS WERE SENT OUT. OF THOSE INVITED, ONLY ONE CAME, AND WHILE A FEW OTHER AMERICANS CAME, THE TOTAL NUMBER WAS "UNDER 10." RIGDON SPECULATED THAT THE STRESSES AND STRAINS IN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS WHICH BECAME EVIDENT DURING FEBRUARY AND MARCH (WHEN THE INVITATIONS WERE BEING SENT OUT) HAD THE EFFECT OF COOLING DOWN SOVIET INTEREST IN A LARGE AMERICAN TURNOUT.

5. ON OPENING DAY, THE CONFERENCE HEARD A MESSAGE
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OF GREETINGS FROM KOSYGIN READ BY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CHAIRMAN V. A. KUROYEDOV. PATRIARCH PIMEN WAS PRESENT, AS WERE THE CATHOLICOS OF THE SOVIET ARMENIAN AND GEORGIAN CHURCHES. METROPOLITAN YUVENALIY CHAIRED THE PLENARY SESSIONS. EXPENSES AND TRANSPORTATION COSTS WERE PICKED UP BY THE SOVIET ORGANIZERS OF THE CONFERENCE. THE CONFERENCE WAS ORGANIZED AS A SINGLE EVENT, WITH NO FURTHER MEETINGS OR PERMANENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE CONTEMPLATED. HOWEVER, ATTENDEES

WERE INVITED TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER BY USING THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS SECTION OF THE PATRIARCHATE AS A "LETTER BOX."

6. THE CONFERENCE WAS ALSO THE SUBJECT OF AN ARTICLE IN JUNE 13 IZVESTIYA BY V. KONDRASHOV AND S. CHUGROV. ACCORDING TO THE AUTHORS, "FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MAJOR FAITHS MET UNDER ONE ROOF" AND ENGAGED IN THE "FREE EXCHANGE OF OPINIONS." ALTHOUGH PARTICIPANTS "DID NOT CLOSE THEIR EYES TO THE COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION," IN THE END THEY REACHED "UNANIMITY" ON HOW TO WORK FOR PEACE.

THE CONFERENCE WAS DESCRIBED AS:

- CALLING FOR A WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT,
- SUPPORTING MBFR TALKS IN VIENNA,
- CALLING FOR CONCLUSION OF A U.S.-SOVIET SALT AGREEMENT,
- PRAISING THE BENEFICENT EFFECTS OF THE HELSINKI FINAL

FINAL ACT, AND

- EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS AND CALLING FOR A SETTLEMENT BASED ON THE RIGHT OF EACH STATE IN THE AREA TO INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY, "INCLUDING RIGHT OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE TO THEIR OWN STATE." ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, THE CONFERENCE ALSO TOOK A NUMBER OF ANTI-IMPERIALIST POSITIONS REGARDING CYPRUS; LIBERATION OF AFRICA FROM RACISM AND COLONIALISM; THE INDIAN OCEAN; AND THE ROLE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IMPERIALIST MONOPOLIES.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE IZVESTIYA ARTICLE WAS LOW-LEYED, ITS HACKNEYED "ANTI-IMPERIALIST" RHETORIC IN DESCRIBING THE VIEWS EXPRESSED AT THE CONFERENCE CONTRASTED WITH THE GENERALLY POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE CONFERENCE PROVIDED BY OUR SOURCE. THE EXPLANATION MAY LIE IN THE FACT THAT THE ABSENCE OF TIGHT CONTROLS OVER THE PROCEEDINGS AND THE ABSENCE OF A DETAILED OFFICIAL RECORD OF SPEECHES MADE AND POSITIONS TAKEN BY THE DELEGATES, ALLOWED THE SOVIET MEDIA TO SELECT APPROPRIATE OPINIONS EXPRESSED BY SOME AFRO-ASIANS (WHO WERE HEAVILY RESENTED), AND TO PRESENT THEM AS MAJORITY VIEWS. AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE NOT AS YET SEEN THE FINAL DOCUMENTS ISSUED BY THE CONFERENCE AND ARE NOT CERTAIN HOW MUCH "ANTI-IMPERIALIST" RHETORIC THEY CONTAIN. OUR SOURCE NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH THE CONFERENCE ACHIEVED A REAL CONSENSUS ON MANY QUESTIONS, THERE WAS NO "UNANIMITY" OF THE KIND DESCRIBED BY ITS ORGANIZERS AT THE FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE -- A PRESS CONFERENCE

WHICH WAS NOT ATTENDED BY A SINGLE WESTERN JOURNALIST.

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Message Attributes

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